

Foodie's Makes its Mark ✓

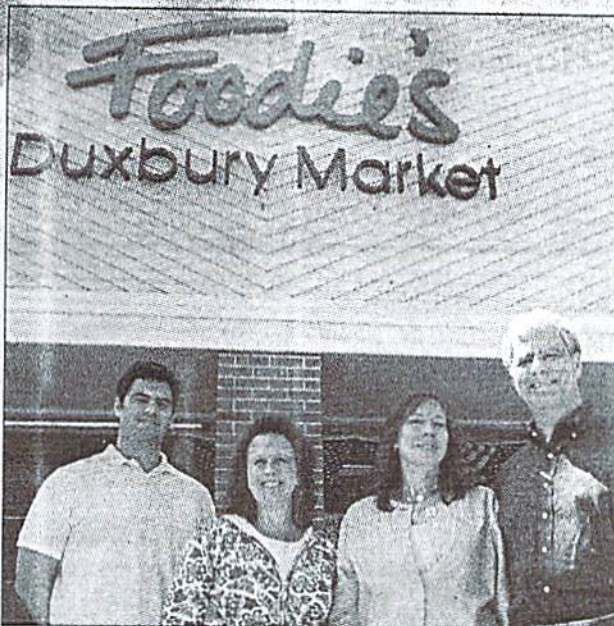
By JUSTIN GRAEBER

A customer known to store employees by her e-mail nickname "Nanny Goat" walks slowly through the aisle of Foodie's market in Hall's Corner. She sees Michelle Conway, the store's community relations guru, and steers her cart over, asking Conway to help her double check her shopping list. Conway explains that the woman comes into the store a couple times a week, asking for help with her groceries.

It's this kind of personal connection to the community that the team of Foodie's hopes make it a different kind of store, and one that will be a fixture in Duxbury for years.

Foodie's has been in Duxbury for nearly a year, and recently celebrated the 10 year anniversary of their original store in Boston's South End.

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Victor Leon Jr., Michelle Conway, Elizabeth Cornaro and Victor Leon outside Foodie's in Hall's Corner. Foodie's has been in Duxbury since December, and store owners see themselves as part of the community.

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Victor Leon stands by one of his favorite sections in the store, the display of hundreds of different kinds of oil. Leon said he sees Foodie's as a specialty store, and also highlighted the store's butter and cheese selection.

Foodie's is owned by Victor Leon and his son, also named Victor. The elder Leon had some experience in the food service industry, as he owned several restaurants in Portland Maine's Old Port district. When Leon decided to start the South End store, he saw a need for a community market, an alternative to the big chain grocery stores.

"We saw it as an underserved community," he said, adding that they saw a similar need in Duxbury. "It's more of a community based approach rather than a mega store."

Leon was first approached by Duxbury Selectman Betsy

ness.

"We have to deliver on our promise too," he said.

The team wanted to bring the same approach to Duxbury that they brought to the South End store.

"We're trying to duplicate what we did in Boston, being extremely community oriented," said Elizabeth Cornaro, who does graphics and marketing for the stores.

In fact, to make sure the store meshed well with the community, the Foodie's team held focus groups at the town's schools, the senior center and the Duxbury Bay Maritime School.

"We met with everyone

shop for groceries, but to meet and relax.

"I think it's becoming that," he said.

"I see it as more than just a grocery store," said Conway, whose cheese tasting classes in the store have been a runaway success.

In addition to classes and themed tours of the store, Foodie's also allows community non-profits to use the last window in the storefront to advertise upcoming events, like this weekend's Family Beach Day.

"That's what makes us different ... how much we interact with the community," said Cornaro.

After a year in town, Leon is pleased with how the store is doing, saying the company is meeting their sales projection. He said he listens to comments placed by Duxbury residents in the comment box at the front of the store, and based in part on those suggestions he is looking to expand the store's capacity for fresh fish.

"We're driven by the customer," he said.

All in all, the Foodie's team hopes the store will become a fixture in the town's center, part of the community itself.

"We're always thinking about it ... trying to become part of the fabric of Duxbury," Leon said.

"We convinced ourselves that this [Duxbury] was not a typical suburban environment ... Duxbury is more of a village."

— Victor Leon (Senior)

Sullivan, who told him of the vacancy left by the A&P and the Grand Union supermarkets.

"She kind of called me out of the blue," Leon said.

The discussions for the store started nearly a year and a half before the store materialized, he said.

"We convinced ourselves that this [Duxbury] was not a typical suburban environment," he said. "Duxbury is more of a village."

The support from Duxbury residents and officials was encouraging, said Leon's son.

"There were a lot of letters, a lot of e-mails," he said.

In fact, the Leons were put in a strange position for a new business in town — In the wake of the long post-A&P vacancy, most residents wanted them to succeed.

"It's refreshing," said the elder Leon. "We wouldn't have come here without that ... I think everyone's been in our corner."

He pointed out that the support from the community

from kids mom's to seniors," said Cornaro. "We wanted to get everyone's say with what they wanted for the store."

There are some differences between the two locations, Leon said. The Boston store is about half the size of the Duxbury location. They also do not run classes in the South End store.

Leon said what he wanted to create with Foodie's is a "third place," a destination between home and work where